

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our deep concern for the safety of the Ukrainian people following Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. At this critical time, we thank you for your strong leadership in uniting the United States and our allies against Vladimir Putin's unjust war. As we take action to aid Ukraine in its defense, we ask that you do all you can to protect the rights and safety of Ukrainians who may be particularly vulnerable. Specifically, we urge you to dedicate sufficient resources and attention to Ukrainian members of marginalized groups that have historically faced violence and persecution under Russian rule and occupation.

The recently adopted U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership confirms the United States' and Ukraine's shared dedication to advancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as "fighting racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and discrimination, including against Roma and members of the LGBTQI+ communities."¹ Now that Russia has launched an unjust war against Ukraine, it is critical to uphold these principles and work with our partners to protect the rights and safety of marginalized Ukrainians. Among the most vulnerable are historically persecuted religious minorities and LGBTQI+ people.

As you know, Ukrainian Jews experienced horrific waves of violence and persecution under Russian and Soviet rule and Nazi German occupation in the 20th century. In recent months, Russia's aggressive rhetoric raised fears among members of Ukraine's Jewish community who still have memories of the antisemitic violence of the last century.² On February 23, Vladimir Putin evoked the term "denazification" to explain his invasion of Ukraine—a nation led by a Jewish President—stating that the purpose of Russian military operations is to protect people facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by Ukrainian leadership.³ As the Anti-Defamation

¹ U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership (November 10, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-ukraine-charter-on-strategic-partnership/>

² Schwirtz, Michael, *For Ukraine's Jews, the Threat of War Stirs Memories of Past Horrors*, The New York Times (February 24, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/europe/ukraine-jews-russia-evacuations.html>

³ Sokol, Sam, *Ukrainian Jews Angry and Appalled at Putin's 'Denazification' Claim*, Haaretz (February 24, 2022), <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium-ukrainian-jews-angry-and-appalled-at-putin-s-denazification-claim-1.10632913>

League points out, Russia has instrumentalized antisemitism to influence domestic and foreign public opinion in its conflict with Ukraine.⁴ This politicization of antisemitism can severely harm Jewish communities. Moreover, the dishonest use of the language of “denazification” as pretext, and the shocking March 1 attack on the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial, indicate that, in reality, Russia’s invasion poses significant risk to Ukrainian Jews.

Additionally, we have received reports that highlight the extreme risks LGBTQI+ Ukrainians face at the hands of Russian forces. As you know, LGBTQI+ people widely face discrimination and persecution in Russia. In Chechnya, reports have documented what has been described as a large-scale “anti-gay purge” by Russian security forces.⁵ When the killings of gay men began in Chechnya in 2017, the Trump Administration was slow to respond and failed to work with organizations that resettle LGBTQI+ people who faced danger. We cannot repeat the previous administration’s mistakes. Russia’s military presence in Ukraine endangers the lives of LGBTQI+ Ukrainians and reverses the progress that country has made toward equality.

For these reasons, we urge you to:

- Ensure close and continued dialogue with organizations that serve Ukrainian members of marginalized groups, including religious minorities and LGBTQI+ people;
- Fund and support shelters to serve vulnerable populations that face particular risk at the hands of Russian forces;
- Ensure U.S. Embassies in Eastern Europe are equipped to provide immediate assistance to those fleeing the Russian war in Ukraine; and
- Provide assistance for transgender Ukrainian individuals whose visible gender does not match their documents as they cross checkpoints and international boundaries.

Russian forces have demonstrated a lack of respect for international law and human rights during military operations in recent years. As Russia continues its unjust attack on Ukraine, we urge you to do all you can to protect Ukrainians who are especially at-risk in this conflict.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

⁴ *Choosing Antisemitism: Instrumentalization and Tolerance of Antisemitism in Contemporary European Politics*, Anti-Defamation League (February 2021), <https://www.adl.org/antisemitism-in-contemporary-european-politics>

⁵ *“They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me” Anti-Gay Purge by Local Authorities in Russia’s Chechen Republic*, Human Rights Watch (May 26, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/26/they-have-long-arms-and-they-can-find-me/anti-gay-purge-local-authorities-russias>

/s/
Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

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Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

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Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
André Carson
Member of Congress

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Daniel T. Kildee
Member of Congress

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Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Member of Congress

/s/
Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

/s/
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

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Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

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Mark Takano
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David N. Cicilline
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Nikema Williams
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Dina Titus
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Linda T. Sánchez
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Haley Stevens
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